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To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Merlana Chadwick and I am a Lead Youth Support Staff at Montana Youth Homes. I began working at the Margaret Stuart Youth Home for Boys and I moved over to the Jan Shaw Youth Home for Girls at the beginning of 2010. I've worked for Montana Youth Homes for a total of 20 months, functioning as a lead staff for the last 12 months.

As a lead staff, I take on some case management duties which include scheduling medical and dental appointments, doing monthly progress reports, drawing up case plans and attending treatment team meetings.

In addition to these duties I work on the floor with the girls Monday through Friday, five to mid-night. My duties on the floor include supervising physical activities, making sure that dinner is prepared, holding nightly group discussions and aiding them with their studies, just to name a few. Our house holds up to eight girls at a time, so I can tell you I practice the art of patience and persistence on a daily basis.

I choose to work at Montana Youth Homes for a number of reasons but I will begin by telling you that I have loved working with children of all ages since I was a child myself. My family took in Foster children through-out my childhood and through this experience I had the opportunity to encounter children who had been abused, neglected and sexually traumatized; children with Reactive Attachment Disorder and Fetal alcohol syndrome, ~~just to name a few~~. I saw heart-break and pain that children should never have to go through and from then on I have had a tug on my heart to help children who are hurting.

We take in youth from ages 12-18. They come to us for a variety of reasons, but generally their circumstances stem from neglect, abuse, sexual trauma or at best a very unstable family life. We see youth with personality disorders, depression, drug addiction, criminal behavior and many other conditions. <sup>with that said</sup> So it is my compassion, <sup>even on the most</sup> difficult days, that drives me to do what I can to make a difference <sup>in their lives</sup> of the lives of our youth at Montana Youth Homes.

Aside from the heart-break I feel for our youth I get joy and gratification out of building relationships with them and having the opportunity to have a hand in their success. I take pride in teaching and guiding them in daily in building social, relational and independent living skills. I find that a majority of the youth have not been taught ~~these skills in their own homes~~. I like to think that I can offer ~~them~~ <sup>them</sup> tools that they can take with them when they leave and that just maybe something I say or something I do will impact the choices they make for their future. Just last night I had one of our girls share with me that she is confident about dealing with a conflict with another resident because of a therapy technique that she has learned. She has been with us for 9 months

now and I'm amazed all the time about how far she has come. We have seen a large decrease in self-harming behavior, thanks to this therapy technique that was originally suggested by our Program Coordinator, Zoe Barnard. This is an example of why I am particularly proud to work at Montana Youth Homes. I believe that our management and Youth Support Staff genuinely desire to be directly involved in enhancing the life of Montana's youth. I see this reflected by the fact that we are constantly communicating and taking action to improve the quality of our program. This includes requests and input that comes directly from our youth. We are continually seeking new ideas and new ways that we can help our youth succeed, while prioritizing their safety and security with-in our household.

I believe that our genuine compassion and concern for Montana's Youth makes us a huge asset to our surrounding community. This is reflected by our consistent population of DPHHS referrals and long-term placements.

I am proud that it is the focus of our program to provide knowledge of foundational concepts like safety, security and healthy relationships. I believe through this knowledge our youth are given a chance to succeed, which ultimately will affect the future of our community and culture, as well as the individual lives of our youth.

I find that even the most difficult cases we encounter inspire me to improve myself as an individual as well as challenge our team to evaluate ways that we can improve the quality of our youth's lives within our program and outside of it.

It is my goal as a Lead Youth Support Staff to encourage, support and guide our youth into becoming productive, confident and caring members of our society. I do my job with the belief and hope in my heart that my efforts will truly make a difference in their lives.